

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SANTIA 04952 302135Z
ACTION ARA-14

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FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9712
INFO AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

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AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES FOR LEGAL ATTACHE

E. O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SHUM, PGOV, CI
SUBJECT: LETELIER/MOFFITT -- AMBASSADOR'S ABSENCE -- ARGENTINE
THREAT: GOC DOING ITS BEST TO REASSURE THE FAITHFUL

REFS: (A) SANTIAGO 4832, (B) SANTIAGO 4587, (C) SANTIAGO 4921
(D) SANTIAGO 4822

1. SUMMARY: MEDIA COVERAGE OF AMBASSADOR LANDAU'S RETURN FOR CONSULTATION DROPPED PRECIPITOUSLY JUNE 28 AND WAS REPLACED BY PACIFYING STATEMENTS FROM PRESIDENT PINOCHET AND LESSER OFFICIALS. FOREIGN MINISTER CUBILLOS (JUST BACK FROM THE OASGA), INTERIOR MINISTER FERNANDEZ AND LABOR MINISTER COSTA ADDRESSED A MEETING OF TOP CIVILIAN AND MILITARY OFFICIALS JUNE 29 WITH THE PRESS IN ATTENDANCE. IN SUMMARY, THE OFFICIAL COMMENTS OF THE PAST TWO DAYS BOILED TOWN TO ASSERTIONS THAT RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES AND ARGENTINA ARE NORMAL, PRESIDENT PINOCHET IS FIRMLY IN CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT, AND THAT ANY RUMORS TO THE CONTRARY ON THESE AND SIMILAR MATTERS ARE ABSOLUTELY FALSE AND ILL-INTENTIONED. END SUMMARY

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PAGE 02 SANTIA 04952 302135Z

2. AFTER BEING THE MAJOR ITEM OF NEWS FOR FOUR DAYS, MEDIA ATTENTION TO AMBASSADOR LANDAU'S RECALL FOR CONSULTATIONS DROPPED SHARPLY JUNE 28. EVEN CHILE'S THREE WEEKLY NEWS MAGAZINES, ARRIVING LATE ON THE SCENE, DID NOT GIVE IT AS MUCH ATTENTION AS THE PRECEDING DAYS WOULD HAVE SUGGESTED. THE "ERCILLA" COVER HAD SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CHILEAN AND US FLAGS WITH THE ONE WORD "TENSION." BOTH "QUE PASA" AND "HOY" HAD OTHER COVER STORIES BUT

INCLUDED CORNER BANNERS: "THE RECALL OF AMBASSADOR LANDAU" ("HOY"); "WHAT IS THE UNITED STATES AFTER" ("QUE PASA"). ONLY "QUE PASA" DEVOTED ITS EDITORIAL TO US/CHILE RELATIONS AND THAT DWELT MORE ON PRESIDENT CARTER'S OAS SPEECH THAN AMBASSADOR LANDAU'S RECALL. "QUE PASA'S" POINT: THERE ARE ELEMENTS WITHIN THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT, WORKING WITH MEDIA ORGANS SUCH AS THE "WASHINGTON POST," THAT SEEK TO DAMAGE US/CHILE RELATIONS.

3. PRESIDENT PINOCHET HELPED LAUNCH A MAJOR PUBLIC REASSURANCE EFFORT THROUGH THE MEDIA JUNE 28. HE SAID THAT IT WOULD BE MADNESS FOR ARGENTINA TO SEEK CONFRONTATION OVER THE BEAGLE CHANNEL AND THAT THE RUMORS TO THAT EFFECT ARE PLANTED BY THOSE WHO HOPE TO GAIN ECONOMICALLY (E.G. ON THE STOCK MARKET) FROM THE FEARS AROUSED. HE ASSURED HIS LISTENERS THAT HE WAS FIRMLY IN CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT ("FIRME, MUY FIRME"). NAVY JUNTA MEMBER MERION, ALSO LOOKING SOUTH, SAID THERE WAS NO TRUTH TO THE RUMORS THAT THE ARGENTINES HAD SEIZED TWO ISLANDS. HE ADDED THE THOUGHT THAT THE PERSONS STARTING SUCH RUMORS ARE ILL-INTENTIONED. GENERAL WASHINGTON CARRASCO, JUST BACK FROM EIGHT DAYS IN BUENOS AIRES, OSTENSIBLY TO VIEW THE WORLD CUP, REPORTED THAT RELATIONS WITH ARGENTINA ARE ABSOLUTELY NORMAL, THAT GENERAL VIDELA IS A LOVER OF PEACE, AND THAT ALL PROBLEMS WITH ARGENTINA ARE RESOLVABLE. INTERIOR MINISTER FERNANDEZ DIRECTED HIS REMARKS MORE BROADLY. HE SAID THAT ALL RUMORS CIRCULATING ARE ABSOLUTELY FALSE AND ARE THE PRODUCT OF DISPLACED POLITICIANS OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT PERSUASION COLLUDING WITH THE COMMUNISTS. HE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 SANTIA 04952 302135Z

OBSERVED THAT RELATIONS WITH THE CHURCH ARE ABSOLUTELY NORMAL.

4. THE AFTERNOON OF JUNE 29, THE GOC CALLED TOGETHER ALL CABINET AND SUB-CABINET OFFICIALS AND ALL FLAG-RANK MILITARY FOR A MEETING AT DIEGO PORTALES. GENERAL LEIGH WAS NOT PRESENT. HE IS REPORTED TO HAVE THE FLU. ADMIRAL MERIONNO WAS ALSO ABSENT -- BECAUSE OF "INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENTS." THE FIRST HOUR OF THE TWO AND ONE-HALF HOUR MEETING WAS OPEN TO THE PRESS (ACCORDING TO "EL MERCURIO", AN UNPRECEDENTED ASPECT) AND THE MINISTERS OF INTERIOR, LABOR AND FOREIGN RELATIONS MADE PRESENTATIONS. FOREIGN MINISTER CUBILLOS HAD RETURNED JUST TWO HOURS EARLIER FROM HIS TRIP TO WASHINGTON FOR THE OASGA.

5. ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, INTERIOR MINISTER FERNANDEZ LARGELY REPEATED WHAT HE HAD SAID THE PREVIOUS DAY. HE DISCOUNTED ALL RUMORS AND SAID THAT LUCKILY CHILEANS OUTSIDE OF SANTIAGO PAY NO ATTENTION TO SUCH DISTORTIONS. LABOR MINISTER COSTA, WHO HAS JUST RETURNED FROM A PRIVATE TRIP TO THE UNITED STATES, TALKED MAINLY ABOUT THE JUST-CONCLUDED ILO CONFERENCE IN GENEVA. HE CLAIMED THAT CHILE'S POSITION IN THAT BODY IS ON THE MEND. FOREIGN MINISTER CUBILLOS DIVIDED HIS COMMENTS ABOUT EQUALLY BETWEEN THE OASGA AND VARIOUS ASPECTS OF THE LETELIER/MOFFITT CASE. ON THE

FORMER HE HAD GENERALLY UNCHARITABLE COMMENTS ON US PARTICIPATION IN THE OASGA BUT SAID THAT HE HAD VERY USEFUL DISCUSSIONS WITH MOST OF HIS SOUTH AMERICAN COUNTERPARTS. ON THE LATTER, HE BASICALLY REPEATED THE POINTS CONTAINED IN A FOREIGN MINISTRY PRESS RELEASE OF JUNE 26 (REFTEL D) QUESTIONING THE MOTIVES AND NEED FOR AMBASSADOR LANDAU'S RETURN TO WASHINGTON FOR CONSULTATIONS BUT ADDING THAT HE WAS SURE IT WOULD HAVE POSITIVE RESULTS, AND REITERATING CHILE'S WILLINGNESS TO COOPERATE ON THE BASIS OF RECIPROCITY AND RESPECT FOR INTERNAL LEGAL REQUIREMENTS (SEE REFTEL C FOR PARTIAL TEXT OF CUBILLOS' REMARKS).

6. COMMENT: THE SITUATION HERE IS NOT "ABSOLUTELY NORMAL."
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